

Dezinformatsiya

John Barron

In practising what it calls disinformation, the Soviet union has for years sponsored grand deceptions calculated to mislead, confound, or inflame foreign opinion. Some of these subterfuges have had a considerable impact on world affairs. Some also have had unforeseeable consequences severely detrimental to Soviet interests. Ultimately, they have made the Soviet Union the victim of its own deceit...

With KGB approval and support, the Czech STB in the autumn of 1964 initiated a vast deception campaign to arouse Indonesian passions against the United States. Through an Indonesian ambassador they had compromised with female agents, the Czechs purveyed to President Sukarno a series of forged documents and fictitious reports conjuring up CIA plots against him. One forgery suggested that the CIA planned to assassinate Sukarno; another 'revealed' a joint American-British plan to invade Indonesia from Malaysia. The unstable Sukarno responded with anti-American diatribes, which some Indonesian journalists in the pay of the KGB and STB amplified and Radio Moscow played back to the Indonesian people. Incited mobs besieged American offices in Djakarta, anti-American hysteria raged throughout the country, and US influence was eradicated. The former STB deception specialist Ladislav Bittman has written a history and analysis of the operation in which he participated. He states, 'We ourselves were surprised by the monstrous proportions to which the provocation grew.'

This brilliant tactical success, however, ended in a débâcle. Bittman notes: 'Czechoslovak and Soviet disinformation departments, intoxicated by potential gains in the battle against the main enemy, deliberately shut their eyes to the danger that the consequences could also be the heightening of internal tension and intensification of Chinese influence in the country.' Encouraged by the increasingly influential Chinese and misled by the climate the Czechs and Russians had created, Indonesian communists concluded that the time was propitious for a coup. The night of September 30, 1965, they murdered six Indonesian generals and attempted to seize the government. The Indonesian military reacted by slaughtering tens of thousands of communists and annihilating the Party, then one of the largest in the world. Indonesia, which seemed destined to slip irretrievably into the communist orbit, emerged as an independent nation with a strong government determined to retain its independence.

Despite such fiascos, Soviet rulers have shown no disposition to abandon organized deception as an instrument of national policy. The practice is another legacy of Lenin embedded in Soviet custom. Just as Lenin admired terror, he extolled the 'poisoned weapons' of deceit, duplicity, and slander. He wrote:

'The communists must be prepared to make every sacrifice and, if necessary, even resort to all sorts of cunning schemes and stratagems, to employ illegal methods, to evade and conceal the truth... The practical part of communist policy is to incite one [enemy] against another... We communists must use one country against another.. My words were calculated to evoke hatred, aversion, and contempt... not to convince but to break up the ranks of the opponent, not to correct an opponent's mistake but to destroy him, to wipe his organization off the face of the earth. This formulation is indeed of such a nature as to evoke the worst thoughts, the worst suspicions about the opponent.'

Out of these 'Principles of Leninism' the contemporary Soviet concept of *Dezinformatsiya*, or disinformation, has evolved. The Russians define disinformation as 'the dissemination of false and

provocative information.’ As practised by the KGB, disinformation is far more complex than the definition implies. It entails the distribution of forged or fabricated documents, letters, manuscripts, and photographs; the propagation of misleading or malicious rumours and erroneous intelligence by agents; the duping of visitors to the Soviet Union; and physical acts committed for psychological effect. These techniques are used variously to influence policies of foreign governments, disrupt relations among other nations, undermine the confidence of foreign populations in their leaders and institutions, discredit individuals and groups opposed to Soviet policies, deceive foreigners about Soviet intentions and conditions within the Soviet Union, and, at times, simply to obscure depredations and blunders of the KGB itself.

Disinformation operations differ from conventional propaganda in that their true origins are concealed, and they usually involve some form of clandestine action. For this reason, Soviet rulers always have charged their clandestine apparatus with primary responsibility for disinformation.

The Cheka and each of its organizational descendants had a ‘Disinformation Desk’ until reorganization of the KGB in 1959 produced a full-fledged Disinformation Department known as Department D of the First Chief Directorate. The first director was General Ivan Ivanovich Agayants, a tall aloof Armenian with grizzled hair and a thin gray mustache. Ascetic and solemn, Agayants combined personal puritanism with a penchant for professional ruthlessness. He gathered a staff of some fifty officers at the Centre and stationed another fifteen to twenty at the KGB’s Karlshorst Residency in East Berlin. Additionally, he received authorization to engage scientists, technical specialists, and military officers as consultants whenever needed. After the death of Agayants and another reorganization in 1968, the Disinformation Department became Department A, acquiring more stature in the Foreign Directorate bureaucracy and, reportedly, more personnel.

Occasionally Disinformation Department officers travel abroad to participate in operations. Agayants slipped into Sweden in 1963 and Pakistan in 1965. He also went to Indonesia in 1965 and periodically visited Eastern Europe to inspect satellite disinformation departments. His deputy, Sergei Aleksandrovich Kondrashev, travelled to Bonn in 1966 hunting material for slandering West German political leaders. Another Disinformation Department Officer, Yuri Ivanovich Lyudin, using the alias Yuri Ivanovich Modin, spent ten months in New Delhi preparing the forgeries that the KGB released to influence the 1967 Indian elections. A few disinformation officers, such as Vladimir Aleksandrovich Chuchukin, a first secretary of the Soviet UN mission in New York, are permanently stationed abroad. However, for most field work abroad, Department A relies upon officers and agents from the First Chief Directorate’s geographic divisions. It also may avail itself of saboteurs from Department V or bona fide Soviet diplomats who at times are employed to plant rumours, wittingly or unwittingly.

John Barron, *KGB*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1974. In *The Penguin Book of Lies*, pp. 420-423

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